

reveal that the directors themselves think of and experience the genre as an art. Even if music videos disrupt some sort of private listening experience, they also give us something: music videos are a way to teach us about a song. As an encapsulation of music video, Palm's contribution seems paltry. But it does provide us with a larger body of work to share and talk about.

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*Don Cherry's MultiKulti*. Kultur DVD 4007, 2005.

*The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Swim—A Musical Adventure*. Kultur DVD 4009, 2005.

Categorizing contemporary musical practices is a rather precarious pastime, since drawing public lines around creativity tends to create as many enemies as it does friends. Wynton Marsalis, for instance, has been variously praised and persecuted in recent years for his outspoken definitions of jazz music and for his moves to legitimize, institutionalize, and, ultimately, canonize a specific narrative of jazz in the American cultural imagination (a narrative that was given a considerable boost by Ken Burns's PBS documentary). In particular, Marsalis has never been shy about stressing the conventional musical elements that characterize and hence distinguish jazz; his outspoken definitions of the music most often include some phraseology of an "acoustic," "blues-based" music that "swings." Neither of the videos under review fits easily into this definition of jazz, yet they are both infused with the spirit of exploration and pleasure in surprise that defines good jazz to many.

When pressed in interviews for their own definitions, Don Cherry and members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago (AEC) often emphasized the fluid and porous nature of their music. Discussing with Ted Panken on WKCR-FM the early days of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), the Chicago-based artist collective from which the AEC emerged, the group's trumpeter Lester Bowie commented: "Well, what we did, we felt free to express ourselves in any way that we thought of. If anyone had an idea, we'd try it. It wasn't like, 'Oh, man, we can't do that; that's not jazz' or something similar to that sort of thought. 'Oh, man, we can't play that; there's a tempo there' or 'We can't play that; there's no tempo there.' We were just kind of open to every possibility, every idea someone had."<sup>1</sup> In an interview with jazz journalist Howard Mandel, Cherry recounted: "It's important for me to be a part of world music, to meet and make music with the musical masters. I feel free to play whatever I want to play, whether it's different styles of music, or classical, folk or devotional musics, or music that has aspects

<sup>1</sup> Lester Bowie and Malachi Favors, interview with Ted Panken, WKCR-FM, New York, 22 November 1994, <http://www.jazzhouse.org/library/index.php3?read=panken8>.

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of all those three things—which I believe can co-exist—along with educational components.”<sup>2</sup> As educational materials, these two DVD releases do not offer the ideal documents of these artists at their performative peak—they were recorded only a few short years before several of the musicians passed away, including Cherry, Bowie, and, most recently, AEC bass player/percussionist Malachi Favors—nor do the skimpy packages include much in the way of details about the performers or the performances. But they do provide a helpful audiovisual window into these musicians’ boundary-crossing musical careers.

*Don Cherry’s Multikulti*, a name shared by his group and its 1989 CD release on A&M Records, was recorded in 1991 before a live audience at the Theaterhaus in Stuttgart, Germany. The scaled-down ensemble heard here features Peter Apfelbaum switching between saxophone, flute, and piano; Bo Freeman playing electric bass; and Joshua Jones playing drum set. The leader divides his time between playing his signature pocket trumpet, a hunter’s harp-lute from Mali called *doussn’gouni*, various keyboard instruments including the melodica, piano, and synthesizer, and providing the occasional wordless vocal. Apfelbaum composed most of the songs for this performance (with the exception of a touching medley of Thelonious Monk tunes played by Cherry alone at the piano), but after studying intensely with Cherry at the Creative Music Studios in Woodstock, New York, Apfelbaum’s music, and that of his San Francisco-based Hieroglyphics Ensemble, mirrors Cherry’s ideals very well. Most of the grooves explored during the set hover near the reggae and 12/8 Afro-tinged end of the spectrum while the melodies are memorable to the point of catchy, a quality that also infused many of Cherry’s earlier, more experimental, and now often hard-to-find recordings.

Those expecting to hear the long and sinewy solo statements on trumpet that Cherry was famous for during his time with Ornette Coleman, the intricate group sound that marked his classic Blue Note sides as a leader (*Complete Communion*, *Symphony for Improvisers*), or even the delicate acoustic interplay that pervaded his globe-trotting work with Codona and other “world” musicians will most likely be disappointed that Cherry’s chops by this point in his career do not allow him the same dexterity, nor do the pop leanings of his rhythm section afford him the same delicacy. Cherry’s propensity for a rather impromptu approach to band leading—alluded to in the back cover description as “cheeky”—may also be disconcerting to some listeners (and it clearly keeps Apfelbaum on his toes during the performance). Yet in the final assessment, it is most likely Cherry’s life force and expansive creative vision, rather than his chops, that impressed the audience in attendance that night, and it is his playful spirit that allows this music to sound relatively fresh even today.

*Swim—A Musical Adventure* documents a 1993 concert in Bremen, Germany, featuring the AEC and the Deutschen Kammerphilharmonie in what appears, appropriately, to be an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The program includes two extended compositions that were written explicitly for the event, *Swim*, by Klaus Obermaier and Robert Spoor, and *Magic Sculptures Stripe the Air, Breathless*, by Wilfried-Maria Danner. Despite what might be expected from the venue’s acoustics,

<sup>2</sup> Howard Mandel, “World Jazz Spirit,” *The Scotsman*, 1995, <http://www.jazzhouse.org/gone/index.php3>.

the audio presentation of the DVD is quite good, with a full ensemble sound and relatively transparent sonic details.

“Jazz meets the orchestra” experiments tend to run the risk of subordinating one to the other or merely juxtaposing the two to little musical success, but this collaboration achieves more equal footing (perhaps because the AEC employs an “orchestral” approach to its own music) and the result is pleasantly integrated. Rather than positioning themselves more brazenly in front of the orchestra, the AEC is arranged on stage as a natural outgrowth of the percussion and wind sections. Although the musical transitions between the groups feel a bit calculated at times, this musical “turn taking” also gives way to more seamless developments when the complex rhythms, dissonant harmonies, angular melodies, and striking timbres from both groups coalesce. Some charming visual effects, overlaying multiple camera angles at appropriate points, also add to the growing sense of synergy between and among the two groups.

*Swim* begins with a gradual and continuous ascending glissando in the strings that creates an effect not unlike the rising stripes on a barber’s pole, an audio illusion that music psychologists know as the Shepard-Risset glissando. After a few minutes, the AEC enters dramatically with an explosion of their characteristic “little percussion,” including gongs, bullroarers, horns, and a variety of struck instruments. Lester Bowie receives onscreen credit as the only featured soloist for this work—and he is heard on trumpet to great effect early on—but Roscoe Mitchell later offers a lengthy bit of snake charming on soprano sax that should have merited mention as well. The ending of the piece devolves in a way that harkens back to the introductory texture but here is produced through a diminution of dynamics and durations rather than continuous changes in pitch, creating a somewhat predictable but still satisfying conclusion. During the enthusiastic applause, the two Austrian composers appear center stage to take their triumphant bow wearing Speedos and goggles, a bold gesture that may evoke from viewers as many grimaces as it does laughs.

*Magic Sculptures Stripe the Air, Breathless* begins with some complex textures in the orchestra that segue via a polyrhythmic vocalization performed by the AEC into a funky groove featuring Lester Bowie’s New Orleans-meets-Saturn trumpet calls and Joseph Jarman (wearing a trench coat and sideways baseball cap on top of his regular African clothing and face paint) performing a rap about the dangers of crack cocaine. Although this description may make it sound far-fetched, the musical moment is actually quite powerful. In general, Danner’s score does not fit together as easily as the overarching design of *Swim* by Obermaier and Spoor, but it covers more musical ground, including a lengthy and spirited trio improvisation by Bowie, Mitchell, and Jarman. At times it is unclear how much is actually notated in the score, since even during passages that sound fully improvised the AEC members are glancing at their parts and turning pages. Unfortunately, the single-sheet insert that accompanies the disc offers no description of the event (nor does it even credit the composers of the works). During the radio interview with Panken, Bowie recalled that the complete performance was filmed for German television and included four other pieces that together formed an “Art Ensemble greatest hits, so to speak.” This footage, if available, certainly would have provided a valuable extra feature for the DVD.

Do these videos deserve a place in our American music or jazz history classrooms? If one subscribes to Marsalis's definition, then they do not offer "prototypical" jazz. Yet few, if any, of our exalted jazz greats played "prototypical" jazz for their time. Duke Ellington is often heralded for his music that was "beyond category," but the phrase applies equally well to the music of Mingus, Monk, Miles, Trane, Ornette, Cecil, Sun Ra, and quite a few others. The AEC's slogan, "Great Black Music: Ancient to Future," encapsulates this issue well. In addition to an implied critique of the ways in which "great" has historically been used to describe only pan-European "classical" music, the phrase also highlights the group's intention to refuse industry-imposed stylistic descriptions on what they do, a convention that has too often served in the past to circumscribe the creative practices, and to contain the commercial possibilities, of African American artists.<sup>3</sup> The editorial description of *Swim—A Musical Adventure* ends with the promotional phrase "The future never sounded so exhilarating." If our descriptions and narratives of jazz remain malleable enough to embrace the work of these and other creative visionaries, and our classrooms remain open enough to encourage dialogue about the complex issues that inform cultural, historical, and artistic debates, then the phrase may resonate as more than a simple platitude.

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*Harry Chapin—Remember When: The Anthology*. MPI Home Video VHS and DVD 7697, 2005.

Harry Chapin, one of America's best musical storytellers, died on 16 July 1981, in a fiery crash when a truck on the Long Island Expressway struck his car. Following his death, radio stations across the nation broadcasted musical tributes to honor and to celebrate Chapin's musical and humanitarian contributions; at his funeral Senator Patrick Leahy and Representatives Ben Gilman and Tom Downey eulogized Chapin's humanitarian efforts. Always caring and conscientious, Chapin, whose musical benefits for World Hunger netted more than \$5 million, represented the best of what America could be: he encouraged humankind to think and to act positively. Chapin was a kind, loving, gentle, intelligent man who donated time, energy, and money to help the needy, and he maintained a sense of idealism and activism that persuaded listeners to believe in something—a movement or simply individuals.

<sup>3</sup> For lively debate on the implications of this slogan, see Jason Berry, "Declamations on Great Black Music," *Lenox Avenue* 3 (1997): 41–52; and George E. Lewis, "Singing Omar's Song: A (Re)construction of Great Black Music," *Lenox Avenue* 4 (1998): 69–92.